

BEAUTY WAR ON EASTER ISLAND



Texts + Pictures: Eric lafforgue



The Tapati festival takes place every year in February on Easter Island. The island is split into 2 teams, each of which is lead by a beauty queen. The teams will have to gain points for their queen by taking part in sporting and cultural contests. Lili Pate, showing us her range of costumes, dreams of winning the 2012 contest.



The festival is an occasion for the younger generations to carry on ancient traditions. The Rapanui dialect is taught in schools and is often used in everyday life. Only half of the 6700 inhabitants of the island are originally from it, the rest come from Chile. An independence movement clearly displays its demands.



Lili Pate and Céline Bour (who is half-French from her father's side) represent their teams and challenge each other on stage. A jury will assess all the events, including judging the most beautiful attire, which represent months of work. At the end of the festival, points will be tallied and the leader of the winning team will be crowned Queen of Tapiti.



The Kai Kai is one of the events of the Tapati: an ancient technique that consists of creating geometric figures with a rope that the nimble hands of a storyteller transforms into complex shapes that evolve with the story being told... This tradition can also be found on islands such as Vanatu.



The Takona: body paintings require a long preparation behind the scenes. In a quasi-religious silence and in dimness, the warriors get ready, then bound onto the stage to tell the stories about their ancestors' feats.



More than 50000 euros are spent by Lili and Céline's families to create hundreds of traditional costumes, made from feathers, sea shells and foliage, and which will be worn during ballets that draw 200 people. Everyone on the island is a cousin, but during the festival you could cut the tension with a knife.



The most dangerous competition is the Haka Pei: plunging down a hill at 80 km/h on banana tree trunks. The year's novices say an obligatory prayer the day before...



After covering themselves in tribal illustrations, the participants gather at the summit of the Maunga Pu'i volcano to get ready before the descent. The main aim is to arrive safe and sound at the bottom. Accidents aren't uncommon.



For Loti Garcia, the son of a former diver on Cousteau's Calypso, it's a first. He'll later admit to have lived the most exciting moment of his life during the 10-second descent.



The participants will dance, sing, surf, swim, lift rocks, throw javelins, sculpt and even row along the Hanga Roa coast. Tattoos are a part of Easter Island's culture and many tourists give in to the appeal of a permanent souvenir of their stay.



One of the events consists of presenting traditional dishes to the jury. Here you can see a Ceviche, an Easter Island specialty: a raw fish marinade to which is added tomatoes, avocados, and onions... Appearance is everything, the jury doesn't taste anything!



On the Anakena beach, while the men take part in a heavy rock-lifting contest, the women take part in races during which they have to stones in front of themselves. Each point counts, and the competition is ferocious.



This event consists of planting a spear into a banana tree trunk, which is 20 meters away. Only two competitors will manage it. The athletes are often dancers who perform for tourists at Hanga Roa, and who every year take part in a sexy calendar, which enjoys a great success with the female tourists.



The festival ends with a carnival, which mingles inhabitants and tourists. As per tradition, everyone bathes in a volcanic mud, the Kiea, and a one sized G-string made from foliage is worn to stunning effect.



Lili and Céline's teams take part in a final battle during carnival day: cover the tourists in as much make-up as possible to add them to their teams and accumulate points. Counting the points is taken very seriously and takes hours.



The dresses worn during Tapati show obvious cultural parallels with neighboring Polynesian islands (Marquises, Tahiti...). Many Tahitians come to Easter Island, and are shopkeepers.



The carnival roams the streets of Hanga Roas, lead by warriors who perform a Haka while citing phrases from the famed Moais, who draw in 65000 tourists every year to the island.



Just hours to the final result, Luis Tomas Pate Riroroko puts the finishing touches to the 2012 festival queen's crown. The white part is created from shark vertebra bones.

That night, Lili Pate is given the crown. Her team garnered the most points during the different events. She will represent Easter Island for a year. But as soon as the 2012 edition is over, two new teams already start work on the 2013 Tapati!

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